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RELS 252L.01: Medieval Allegory

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Medieval Allegory

RELS 252L
Spring, 2005
TTh 9:40-11:00
LA 138
3 credits

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Office: LA 101A
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Hours: MW 11-12
& by appointment

Allegory is a figurative statement or story that says one thing and means another. It is the interpretation of experience by means of images and symbols – an extended metaphor. We will investigate five creative, literary allegories of the quest and one critical, philosophical allegory. The late antique/early medieval Latin *Consolation of Philosophy* narrates a dialogue between the imprisoned Boethius and his muse, Lady Philosophy, who leads him through a discussion of fate and providence. *The Conference of the Birds* is a famous Persian Sufi tale about a fantastic voyage by thirty birds. *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, an Old French romance, portrays the search for the grail as a spiritual quest. *The Divine Comedy*, perhaps the sacred poem of the West, describes Dante's incredible journey through Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise. An unknown English poet composed *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late medieval Arthurian allegory of seduction and the hunt; the same author also wrote *Pearl*, an elegant parable of loss and renewal.

Course Syllabus

- 1/25, 27 Introduction, definitions and forms. Language, theory, and interpretation in allegorical discourse. Exegesis and 'allegory of the theologians'; narrative and 'allegory of the poets'.
- 2/1,3, 8, 10 *The Consolation of Philosophy* – allegory as philosophical therapeutic
- 2/11 Last day to add/drop by Cyberbear
- 2/15, 17, 22, 24 *The Conference of the Birds* – Sufism and the path of desire and annihilation
- 3/1, 3, 8,10,15 *The Quest of the Holy Grail* – 'adventure' and interpretation; romance as anti-romance
- 3/17 Drop/add deadline
- 3/17 Midterm exam
- 3/21-25 Spring break
- 3/29, 31 *The Commedia – Inferno* – the drama of sin in the hell descent

4/5,7	<i>Purgatorio</i> – the island mount of purification
4/12, 14	<i>Paradiso</i> – Beatrice and the vision of God
4/19, 21,	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> – combat and fidelity
26, 28	in the court of King Arthur
5/3, 5	<i>Pearl</i> - vision, exegesis, and paraenesis
5/9	Final exam

Required Reading

Anonymous, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (Penguin)
 Attar, Farid ud-Din, *The Conference of the Birds* (Penguin)
 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Penguin)
 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* in *The Portable Dante* (Viking Portable Library)
 Pearl Poet, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*
 (University of California Press)
 Pearl Poet, *Pearl* in *ibid.*

Course Requirements

1. Prompt completion of assigned reading and participation in class discussion.
 Three absences (or persistent tardiness) will lower your grade one letter grade.
 Six absences will result in failure of the course.
2. Midterm exam (3/17) and final exam (5/9).
3. One 5-7 page essay on the nature of the quest in the first three works due at the time of the midterm exam. A second essay will address the same topic in the final three works and will be due at the end of the term.

No extensions on written assignments. Evidence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course.